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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 000394

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [EAID](#) [SU](#) [EUN](#)
SUBJECT: EU SUDAN POLICY FOCUSES ON ENGAGEMENT THROUGH
NEIGHBORS

REF: STATE 24927

Classified By: CDA Christopher W. Murray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: EU foreign ministers agreed this week that EU policy on Sudan should focus not on direct engagement with President Bashir, but rather on convincing African, Arab and other countries with influence in Sudan to intervene. The EU also agreed to keep the ICC decision and the subsequent NGO expulsion as two clearly separate issues in its public discourse. An offer from Egypt to convene an international conference on Sudan is not gaining traction in the EU, despite the Egyptian Foreign Minister's efforts to convince the Troika during a March 15 dinner. The EU's humanitarian Directorate fears the expulsion of Western NGOs will lead to more impunity and atrocities in Sudan without witnesses from the international community. End Summary.

Principles vs. Realpolitik

12. (C) As the European Union weighs the extent to which it should pressure Sudanese President Bashir to reverse his expulsion of humanitarian NGOs, it walks a fine line between member states who want to take a principled stand and others who believe such pressure could make the situation worse. At the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) meeting March 16 (SEPTEL), EU foreign ministers issued a brief statement calling upon the Government of Sudan "to reconsider their decision urgently, and ensure that humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable people in Sudan be continuously guaranteed." Some member states, during the Africa Working Group meetings leading up to the GAERC, had argued for stronger language and more comprehensive Council Conclusions, according to contacts. The UK and France led the call to stand up forcefully for democratic principles and also to respond to public pressure from constituents who want the EU to play an active role in Sudan. Others, however, felt the EU was overreacting and should let the previously-issued Presidency declarations (March 4 and 9) stand. The Czech Presidency, in particular, argued that public pressure on Bashir is at best ineffective and at worst counterproductive. The Presidency did not support issuing the GAERC Conclusions, but eventually conceded at the behest of the UK and France, contacts said.

13. (C) Among the international players urging restraint is Deputy UN/AU Joint Chief Mediator for Darfur Azouz Ennifar who counseled members of the International Contact Group on Sudan at a March 11 meeting in Brussels against pressuring Bashir to reverse the NGO expulsion. Ennifar said he and Joint Chief Mediator Djibril Bassole believed it would do more harm than good and cause Bashir to dig in his heels as a point of honor.

Pressuring Sudan through its neighbors

14. (C) The EU's general direction forward, agreed at the working level and among the foreign ministers, will be to pressure Bashir indirectly by asking African and Arab states to intervene with the Sudanese President. Member states also have agreed to ask for help from China, India and Russia, according to contacts in the Czech Presidency and the Council Secretariat. EU member states agreed to follow the advice of the ICC prosecutor and avoid non-essential contacts with Bashir. The definition of what contact is essential will be made on a case-by-case basis and will likely include talks about the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Darfur peace process.

15. (C) Egypt has approached the EU, as it has the U.S. (reftel), to encourage participation in a conference on Sudan that would include the Government of Sudan and international actors. Czech and Egyptian diplomats told us that Egyptian Foreign Minister Aboul Gheit raised the idea with the EU Troika during a March 15 dinner. According to the diplomats, Aboul Gheit said Egypt is "disappointed with Bashir," and rejected his assertion that African and Arab NGOs could fill the humanitarian gap that will be left when western NGOs depart. Aboul Gheit promoted to the Europeans a "comprehensive approach" that would include a conference, but said that Bashir did not want one now. Initial EU reactions were negative, according to a Council Secretariat contact who said the EU preferred to emphasize the Qatar peace talks and not create another international forum. Petr Kopriva of the Czech Presidency told us that Egypt also offered to distribute EU humanitarian assistance in Sudan (with

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financial assistance from the EU), an idea the Commission is studying, but unlikely to accept.

Separating NGO expulsion from ICC decision

16. (C) At each point in the EU political discussions, the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) has weighed in to urge clear separation of the NGO expulsion and the ICC arrest warrant against Bashir. Bashir has clearly linked the two issues, and ECHO fears the two are becoming linked in the Western political debate, as well, according to contacts. ECHO is also wrestling with its options following the expulsion of 13 international NGOs, six of which were ECHO partners in Sudan: CARE, Solidarite, ACF, Save the Children (Holland and UK), IRC and Oxfam. The expelled NGOs received 12 million euros from ECHO, representing approximately 15 percent of ECHO's 2009 funding to Sudan, according to ECHO Sudan desk officer Sophie Vanhaeverbeke. While the Government of Sudan and some Arab League countries may step in to provide humanitarian assistance, the loss of "Western eyes and ears," is something the EU must carefully consider, she said. ECHO is working with its staff in Sudan on options, but has not yet decided on an alternative strategy following the expulsions.

17. (C) Comment: The UK and France have the two strongest voices in the EU on Africa policy, but both have been tempered in their public pronouncements about Sudan at the urging of the Czech Presidency and other smaller member states who favor a more subdued approach. The current EU Sudan policy, hammered out in working groups and up to the level of foreign ministers, stresses behind-the-scenes diplomacy through countries to whom Sudan is likely to listen. The focus on separating the ICC decision from the NGO expulsion aligns with the U.S. approach. The EU's initial reaction to Egypt's offer of an international conference also seems to track closely with the U.S. position. End comment.
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